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STATINTL

Blunder Worse Than Crime

The tragedy of Vietnam which has already cost so many American lives, left thousands of GIs wounded, and taken so many millions of the taxpayers' dollar has now been compounded by the revelations in the Pentagon Report as published by The New York Times.

It seems somewhat strange that the Nixon administration, which had nothing to do with the 500,000 men who were sent thousands of miles from home to fight in Asian jungles, is so concerned over the revelations which have now been brought into the open.

It might be annoying to any President to learn that classified information can be taken from the files and given to a newspaper. But the real effect of the Pentagon Report is that it makes the Johnson administration and its leaders look unbelievably bad.

The American public now knows that President Johnson secretly committed this nation by stealth and against the wishes of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to a land war in Asia. It also knows that Mr. Nixon, inheriting this tremendous problem, is desperately trying to wind it down without abandoning the area and making all the sacrifice useless.

These are incontrovertible facts. The attempts of the Democratic senators to discredit the President, to cut his legs out from under him by demanding a deadline, look quite puerile in the light of the Pentagon report.

We recall the 1964 campaign when the Democratic campaign was based on the premise that Senator Barry Goldwater was "trigger happy" and would get us into a shooting war as soon as he was elected. Perhaps under Goldwater we might have become involved in Asia. But, we

have a suspicion, knowing the character of the outspoken Senator from Arizona, that he would have gone to Congress and laid the whole matter before the American public in contrast to the stealth and the blunders directed and managed by Lyndon B. Johnson.

Harsh criticism of the President and his secretary of defense cannot undo the damage which has been wrought. It might be charitable to say that they did what they thought was in the best interest of the nation. But there is never an excuse for lying to the Congress and the American people.

Of course the commander - in - chief cannot be held criminally liable for doing what he thought was best for the country. But he can be convicted before the bar of public opinion for being stupid.

We learn that the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CIA wanted the United States to apply unlimited force and to take out all of the North Vietnamese airfields and its petroleum supplies. They said that it would be over in three days.

But the military and the intelligence experts advice went unheeded by Johnson, McNamara and their civilian advisers.

Any military man could have told Johnson et al that you can't win without destroying an enemies capabilities. But he placed Hanoi and Haiphong off limits and refused to bomb oil tankers.

The kind of war he directed could as easily have been fought by 50,000 men as 500,000 since it was a guerrilla war.

It is a great tragedy to have committed a half million of our finest to this venture. But it is far worse to have sent them there through chicanery, deception and secrecy.